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C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 002937

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV GG

SUBJECT: KVITSIANI ON FIRING IN UPPER KODORI: I DID IT

REF: TBILISI 2915

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4(b)&(d).

¶1. (U) Abkhaz television broadcast November 1 a video, quickly picked up on Georgian channels, in which ousted Upper Kodori warlord Emzar Kvitsiani took responsibility for the October 25 missile attack near the Georgian village of Azhara during the visit of Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Merabishvili. Kvitsiani, appearing in a wooded area dressed in camouflage and sunglasses, said he and his followers would continue to fight against the Georgian government, which ended Kvitsiani's rule in the area in a brief operation in July. In the video, Kvitsiani said "The incident which took place on October 24-25 was once again to remind you of us and that we have not left Kodori and we do not intend to leave. Therefore, I once again want to tell you, my dear fellow countrymen, that there were no foreigners there. It was a clash between us and the forces of the current fascist state -- not state, government -- of Saakashvili. Therefore we once again gave a warning, by actions rather than words."

¶2. (C) Comment: UNOMIG's report (reftel) made a compelling case that the three missiles had not come from the Abkhaz-controlled Tkvarcheli district, as originally reported, but from the mountainside on the southern ridge of the Kodori Gorge overlooking Azhara. It is quite plausible that a group of Kvitsiani's supporters infiltrated this rugged, largely unoccupied area. It is also plausible that they had access to GRAD missiles and improvised launchers. The Georgians seized a number of such weapons in the July operation, and Kvitsiani supporters may have kept some of their stocks hidden away to continue the struggle. End Comment.

TEFFT